

# **WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE**

**2023 REGULAR SESSION**

**Committee Substitute**

**for**

**Senate Bill 475**

BY SENATORS NELSON AND PLYMALE

[Originating in the Committee on Pensions; reported  
on February 2, 2023]



1 A BILL to amend and reenact §8-22-23a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as amended, relating  
2 to examinations for disability pensions; modifying examinations for disability pensions; and  
3 providing the oversight board discretion in the method of medical examinations of a  
4 member applying for disability benefits.

*Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:*

**ARTICLE 22. RETIREMENT BENEFITS GENERALLY; POLICEMEN'S PENSION AND  
RELIEF FUND; FIREMEN'S PENSION AND RELIEF FUND; PENSION PLANS  
FOR EMPLOYEES OF WATERWORKS SYSTEM, SEWERAGE SYSTEM OR  
COMBINED WATERWORKS AND SEWERAGE SYSTEM.**

**§8-22-23a. Eligibility for total and temporary disability pensions and total and permanent  
disability pensions; reporting; light duty.**

1 (a) All members applying for total and temporary or total and permanent disability benefits  
2 after June 30, 1981, shall be examined by at least two physicians under the direction of the staff  
3 at Marshall University, West Virginia University, Morgantown, or West Virginia University,  
4 Charleston: *Provided*, That if a member's medical condition cannot be agreed on by the two  
5 physicians, a third physician shall examine the member: *Provided, however*, That beginning  
6 January 1, 2010, and continuing thereafter, a member applying for total and temporary or total  
7 and permanent disability benefits shall be examined by two physicians, one of which shall be  
8 chosen and paid by the member, and one of which shall be chosen and paid by the oversight  
9 board. If the two physicians disagree, the oversight board shall select and pay for a third  
10 examining physician: *Provided further*, That starting July 1, 2023, and continuing thereafter, the  
11 physician(s) chosen by the oversight board to perform the independent medical examination(s)  
12 may perform an in-person or virtual examination of a member's physical or mental health, or both,  
13 or at the discretion of the oversight board, a medical record review of the member's physical or

14 mental health, or both. The selection of the method of examination is at the discretion of the  
15 oversight board in consultation with the physician.

16 (1) Disability benefits shall be awarded if in the opinion of two of the examining physicians  
17 the member is by reason of the disability unable to perform adequately the job duties required.

18 (2) Each medical examination shall include the review of the member's medical history,  
19 but an examining physician may not have access to the disability examination report or disability  
20 recommendation of another physician.

21 (3) The physicians shall send copies of their reports to both the board of trustees of the  
22 member's pension and relief fund and the oversight board.

23 (4) The expense of the member's transportation to medical examinations shall be paid by  
24 the board of trustees. Medical expense shall not exceed the reasonable and customary charges  
25 for similar services.

26 (5) Beginning January 1, 2010, and thereafter, if a member is charged with an offense that  
27 has the potential to lead to the member's termination, the member's municipal pensions and relief  
28 fund board of trustees may not consider the member's eligibility for disability benefits until after  
29 investigation of the charge is completed and any disciplinary decision is implemented.

30 (6) No later than January 1, 2011, and annually thereafter, each board of trustees shall  
31 report to the oversight board the total number of disability applications received during the prior  
32 fiscal year, the status of each application as of the end of the fiscal year, total applications granted  
33 and denied, and the percentage of disability-benefit recipients to the total number of active  
34 members of the fund.

35 (b) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits after  
36 June 30, 1981, initially or previously under this subsection allowance for initial or additional total  
37 and temporary disability payments, the amount thereof to be determined as specified in section  
38 twenty-four of this article shall be paid to the member during the disability for a period not  
39 exceeding 26 weeks if after a medical examination in accordance with subsection (a) of this

40 section two examining physicians report in writing to the board of trustees that: (1) The member  
41 has become so totally, physically or mentally disabled, from any reason, as to render the member  
42 totally, physically or mentally, incapacitated for employment as a police officer or firefighter; and  
43 (2) it has not been determined if the disability is permanent or it has been determined that the  
44 disability may be alleviated or eliminated if the member follows a reasonable medical treatment  
45 plan or reasonable medical advice: *Provided*, That, in any event, a member is not eligible for total  
46 and temporary disability payments following the fourth consecutive 26-week period of total and  
47 temporary disability unless subsequent disability results from a cause unrelated to the cause of  
48 the four previous periods of total and temporary disability. During the two-year period of total and  
49 temporary disability, the department is required to restore the member to his or her former position  
50 in the department at any time the member is determined to no longer be disabled: *Provided*,  
51 *however*, That the department may refill, on a temporary basis, the position vacated by s the  
52 member after the first 26 weeks of his or her temporary disability.

53 (c) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and permanent disability benefits  
54 initially under this subsection or becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits under  
55 subsection (b) of this section after June 30, 1981, allowance for total and permanent disability  
56 payments, the amount thereof to be determined as specified in section twenty-four of this article,  
57 shall be paid to the member after a medical examination in accordance with subsection (a) of this  
58 section, two examining physicians report in writing to the board of trustees that the member has  
59 become so totally, physically or mentally, and permanently disabled, as a proximate result of  
60 service rendered in the performance of his or her duties in the department, as to render the  
61 member totally, physically or mentally, and permanently incapacitated for employment as a police  
62 officer or firefighter or, if the member has been a member of either of the departments for a period  
63 of not less than five consecutive years preceding the disability, the member has become so totally,  
64 physically or mentally, and permanently disabled, from any reason other than service rendered in  
65 the performance of his or her duties in the department, as to render the member totally, physically

66 or mentally, and permanently incapacitated for employment as a police officer or firefighter. The  
67 phrase "totally, physically or mentally, and permanently disabled" shall not be construed to include  
68 a medical condition which may be corrected if the member follows a reasonable medical treatment  
69 plan or reasonable medical advice.

70 (d) Effective for members becoming eligible for total and temporary disability benefits after  
71 June 30, 1981, under the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, any payments for total and  
72 temporary disability for a period during the disability not exceeding 26 weeks shall cease at the  
73 end of the 26-week period under the following conditions:

74 (1) The member fails to be examined as provided in subsection (a) of this section; or (2)  
75 the member is examined or reexamined as provided in said subsection and two examining  
76 physicians report to the board of trustees that the member's medical condition does not meet the  
77 requirements of subsection (b) or (c) of this section. Effective for members becoming eligible for  
78 total and temporary disability benefits after June 30, 1981, under subsection (b) of this section,  
79 subsequent to the member's receipt of total and temporary disability payments for a period of two  
80 years, the payments shall cease at the end of the two-year period under the following conditions:

81 (A) The member fails to be examined as provided in subsection (a) of this section; or (B) the  
82 member is examined or reexamined as provided in said subsection and two examining physicians  
83 report to the board of trustees that the member's medical condition does not meet the  
84 requirements of subsection (c) of this section.

85 (e) Notwithstanding other provisions of this section to the contrary, a member of a  
86 municipal policemen's or firemen's pension and relief fund who is found to be disabled from  
87 performing the full range of tasks relevant to police officer or firefighter employment, but capable  
88 of performing a restricted or light-duty police officer or firefighter job made available at the  
89 discretion of the employing municipality may choose to continue working and retain an active  
90 membership in his or her pension and relief fund.

CS for SB 475

NOTE: The purpose of this bill to modify examinations for the purpose of determining disability pensions.

Strikethroughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.